

Regulating the Relationship Between Democracy and Political Authority in the Constitutions of Iran and Malaysia: A Comparative Study of the Formation, Distribution, and Control of Power

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the fifth paragraph of the Introduction, the characterization of Malaysia as “a federal parliamentary system based on constitutional monarchy” should be followed by a more explicit explanation of why federalism is analytically relevant to the article’s central question. Later sections invoke federal distribution of competence as part of “multilevel control,” but this relationship is not established at the outset. The authors should clarify whether federalism is treated as a form of vertical separation of powers, a mechanism of authority distribution, an accountability structure, or all three. This point is important because otherwise the Iranian and Malaysian cases are being compared across partially different institutional dimensions, with federalism playing a major role in one case but having no functional equivalent in the other.

In the sixth paragraph of the Introduction, the sentence “the comparison is based not on the nominal similarity of institutions, but on their functions” articulates an important methodological principle, yet the manuscript needs a clearer statement of the functional equivalence rules actually used. For example, the Leader of Iran and the Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia are compared at several points in relation to tenure and termination, even though their constitutional functions, sources of authority, discretionary powers, and positions within their respective systems differ substantially. The authors should explain the minimum criteria that justify placing two institutions within the same comparative category and should distinguish “functional comparability” from “institutional equivalence” throughout the analysis.

In the final paragraph of the Introduction, the authors state that the contribution lies in “linking the three aforementioned stages through the concept of an ‘institutional chain of power.’” This claimed conceptual contribution requires a sharper distinction from existing frameworks concerning separation of powers, checks and balances, horizontal accountability, and

chains of delegation and accountability. At present, the “institutional chain of power” appears primarily to reorganize familiar variables into a sequential analytical scheme. The manuscript should specify what explanatory or analytical capacity the concept adds beyond existing institutional analysis—for example, whether it identifies discontinuities between electoral authorization, competence allocation, and accountability that would otherwise remain analytically obscured.

In the paragraph on Malaysian scholarship, the claim that the Malay monarchies may “extend beyond a simple Westminster model of constitutional monarchy” deserves greater analytical incorporation later in the findings. The current findings characterize the Malaysian model as predominantly cabinet-centered, but the literature review itself signals that royal powers may be contextually significant. The authors should therefore identify the particular constitutional discretionary powers of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong relevant to government formation, dissolution, and other specified matters, and explain how these affect the proposed label “cabinet-centered executive authority.” This would prevent the analytical label from understating constitutionally significant non-cabinet powers.

In the first paragraph of the Theoretical and Analytical Framework, the manuscript combines Dahl, Montesquieu/Madison, and O'Donnell into a single framework. This triangulation is potentially valuable, but the theoretical relationships among these traditions require more explicit articulation. Dahl addresses democratic participation and contestation, Montesquieu and Madison primarily address institutional division and mutual constraint, and O'Donnell conceptualizes interinstitutional accountability. The authors should explain whether these theories operate as complementary dimensions, sequential stages, or independent lenses. They should also acknowledge that “horizontal accountability” is conceptually narrower than the manuscript's broader category of “control,” which includes political responsibility, tenure termination, judicial review, and other institutional mechanisms.

In the paragraph stating that the study uses “only those components that can be observed in constitutional texts,” the operationalization should be substantially expanded. The manuscript identifies election or appointment, direct or indirect popular participation, government formation, duration of tenure, and replacement, but does not explain how these variables were coded. The authors should provide explicit coding questions—for example: Who nominates? Who selects? Is the selection direct or mediated? Is the term fixed or conditional? Which institution may terminate tenure? What legal threshold applies? Such operational detail is especially necessary because the study claims to use qualitative content analysis rather than merely doctrinal constitutional interpretation.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the second paragraph of the Literature Review, the discussion of Lombardi and Grote and Röder appropriately emphasizes institutional design, but the review remains predominantly descriptive rather than synthetic. The sentence that these studies “generally do not compare the three stages of the formation of power, distribution of competences, and accountability” identifies a gap, yet the manuscript should demonstrate this gap more rigorously by explaining how the existing literature conceptualizes each of these dimensions and precisely where integration is absent. A stronger review would organize previous studies according to analytical variables rather than primarily by country and author, thereby demonstrating that the proposed framework genuinely addresses a theoretical deficiency rather than merely an unstudied country pairing.

In the paragraph beginning “Studies concerning Iran can be divided into two broad categories,” the manuscript should engage more critically with the temporal dimension of the sources used. Schirazi's 1997 study remains foundational, but significant constitutional practice, institutional interpretation, and scholarship have developed since its publication. Because the article explicitly confines itself to formal constitutional design, this does not require an extensive political history; however, the authors should explain why the selected literature is sufficient to represent contemporary interpretations of the constitutional structure. The same concern applies to the use of older foundational literature alongside newer studies without an explicit account of changes in constitutional interpretation over time.

In the paragraph discussing Iranian institution-specific studies, the sentence “Beigizadeh likewise demonstrates how the idea of jurists’ supervision was transformed, during the constitution-making process, into constitutional provisions concerning the Guardian Council” is relevant to institutional origins but needs a clearer connection to the article’s analytical framework. The literature review should distinguish historical explanation of institutional formation from analysis of present constitutional competence. Otherwise, constitutional genealogy and current institutional design may be conflated. The authors should indicate explicitly whether historical formation is used only as contextual evidence or whether it contributes to coding the contemporary “formation of authority” dimension.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.